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It's Not the End of the World

Without SALT

New York.

THE armchair warriors are telling anybody who'll listen that it's all up with the new Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT), since the Iranians grabbed the CIA's watchposts on the Russian border.

They explain that now we won't be able to tell whether the Soviets are cheating with their missile tests.

Well, it's a pity the CIA didn't have its antennae pointed the other

By John L. Hess

way. They might have detected the unrest in Iran.

Now we're blind, they tell us. Whatever became of those spy satellites they were bragging about, that could spot a *muzhik* on the steppes picking his teeth with a wheat straw?

It must be said that our warriors are taking this setback with equanimity. They're even talking with grim cheer about the possibility of our losing our similar watchposts in Turkey.

It looks as though we are doomed to high tension and no more SALT for some time to come.

You see, our doves can't get enthusiastic about a treaty that does not reduce arms nor even halt the technological arms race at the present level, while our hawks get nervous about even a suggestion that there might be a limit to military spending. The sky's the only limit they recognize.

The Pentagon of course has always been opposed to SALT. A scandal in the last administration involved a top-secret order to all hands, forbidding them to indicate any sympathy for the principle of arms limitation—which the White House was then negotiating.

The scandal was that the order

pundits were shocked that loyalty in Washington had sunk to such a level.

Anyway, the first SALT treaty was signed—by a Republican administration of course, for a Democratic one would have been eaten alive. The limits it set became goals, which both sides strained to meet. If it slowed the pace of spending, it wasn't visible to the naked eye.

The second treaty was largely negotiated by the Republicans, too, but the finishing touches were left to Jimmy Carter, the fellow who was going to cut the military budget. He was soon persuaded to hustle up some new weapons, as bargaining counters against the Russians.

The figuring in Washington is that the side that gives up the most expensive weapons will be the loser. The contrary could be argued, from an economic point of view. But it won't be.

Some hawks—Zbigniew Brzezinski, for one—have suggested that SALT be linked to other issues. For example, if the Russians don't stop helping Angola, they get no SALT. This assumes that SALT is good for them and not for us—which is an argument for abandoning it altogether.

With help like that, Mr. Carter is in for a hard time selling the treaty.

But let's not get too upset about it. Whether we all get wiped out 40 times or 50 times really makes very little material difference. It's the first time that counts.

And we've lived with that threat for a long time. As more countries get the bomb, the odds get worse. But the late Jacques Monod, the Nobel Prize-winning French scientist, once told me in this connection that the situation could never get hopeless—else, there would be no hope.

An old American farmer told me much the same thing, long ago, just about this time of year. "Wal," he said, "I got through that winter, and I